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THREE CENTER PLAZA, RM 820

February 16, 1971

To the Honorable the Mayor:

Last month, in a letter to Your Honor regarding a proposed contract for the purchase of sculpture for the new police station at Fields Corner, we questioned whether it was appropriate for the City to spend \$8,000 for a work of art at a time of financial crisis. In that letter, the Chairman noted that the City had committed itself to spend, or had actually spent during 1970, approximately \$75,000 for sculpture in connection with public buildings in various parts of the City, specifically the Government Center garage and the fire station in Charlestown. Since our letter was made public, there has been considerable comment in the local papers concerning the City's fine arts acquisition program, as well as criticism for the condition of many of Boston's historic statues and other monuments. Because of the unusual public response to the issues we raised, it seemed appropriate for us to make public a somewhat comprehensive statement on the general subject.

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1. The Art Commission

The acquisition of fine arts by the City of Boston, as well as the care and custody of existing works of art owned by the City, are generally subject to the jurisdiction of the Art Commission. This Commission (formerly known as the Art Department) was established in 1898. It is composed of five commissioners appointed by the Mayor from candidates nominated by the Museum of Fine Arts, the Trustee of the Public Library, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Boston Society of Architects, and the Copley Society of Boston.¹ The Art Commission has general approval power over the acquisition, by gift or purchase, of works of art by the City. It may also, upon the request of the Mayor or City Council, extend its supervisory and approval powers to "the design of municipal building(s), bridge(s), ...lamp(s) (and) ornamental gate(s) or fence(s)." It is not known whether the Mayor and the Council have requested the Art Commission to look into these closely-related questions. In light of the poor condition of most of our ornamental fencing and the outright removal of wrought iron fence from the Common a couple of years ago, it would seem appropriate to make a request for their advice now if one has not already been made. The present membership of the Art Commission includes persons prominent in the artistic and historical life of the City. It is presumed that the Commission represents a broad spectrum of artistic knowledge and taste.

¹See Generally Acts of 1898, Chapter 410.

Until fairly recently, the City normally acquired works of art either by direct appropriation, or as was frequently the case, through the generosity of benefactors who, individually or in groups, donated funds for the erection of statues and other monuments. For example, the funds for the erection of Boston's two greatest monuments--the Colonel Robert Gould Shaw Memorial across from the State House, and the equestrian statue of George Washington in the Public Garden--were raised almost entirely by private subscription. Statues erected with funds from the George Francis Parkman and George Robert White Fund Trusts should, in our opinion, be considered to have been privately donated to the City of Boston.²

2. The "1% Clause"

In the early 1960's the City's fine arts program was enlarged considerably when it became the official policy of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (B.R.A.), in disposing of land within urban renewal projects, to make it a condition of any disposition agreement that the developer (whether private or public) expend 1% of the project cost on fine arts (the "1% clause"). This new official program, together with the B.R.A. policy to encourage the use of outstanding architects in the planning of all new construction within urban renewal areas, was hailed as an important step towards improving the quality of life within the City. Fine arts proposals

²These include Paul Revere Prado, North End; War Memorial, Fenway; Winged Angel, Public Garden; Fountain and Statues, Parkman Mall, Common, among others.

made pursuant to the "1% clause" are reviewed, and in cases of City construction, initiated by the Design Review Staff of the B.R.A. together with its design consultants. Each proposal is later submitted for approval to the Art Commission and, in special cases, to other Departments of the City.³

We believe that the aesthetic objectives of the "1% clause" are commendable. It does seem to us, however, that there should be introduced into the formula some flexibility, especially in the case of massive construction projects costing many millions of dollars, to avoid, in certain cases, the spending by the City of an unreasonably large sum for this worthwhile but ancillary purpose. In view of the great effort being made by the Public Facilities Department and the B.R.A. to select only architectural solutions of a truly distinguished character, it would seem that in many ^{such} cases the architectural conception, by itself, will contain sufficient artistic or sculptural elements to substantially reduce (or even eliminate) the need for spending additional amounts on fine arts. In a given case, we can envision that the "1% clause" could lead to artistic redundancy. The exercise of this judgment should properly rest in the Design Review Staff who are urged to consider the particular facts of each City construction project before deciding what amount should be spent for art and, indeed, what form of art - sculptural, painting, landscaping, fountains, etc. - is most appropriate.

³For example, in case of the sculpture at the Government Center garage, to the Real Property Board.

3. Non-"1% Clause" Construction

With respect to public building projects undertaken by the City alone without the jurisdiction of the B.R.A. and therefore not subject to the "1% clause", it seems to us that fine arts proposals should be carefully reviewed, especially where an outstanding architectural solution has been selected. At a time of enormous financial stress, difficult priorities must necessarily be established. For that reason, in the case of the proposed sculpture at the Fields Corner police station, which was not subject to the "1% clause", we were of the opinion that the expenditure should not be made at this time.

4. The Condition of the City's Art Treasures

Our review of the City's fine arts program led us to consider the City's treatment of existing works of art--many of them of great historic and artistic interest and considerable value. We discovered distressingly little activity in the area of preservation and conservation of our existing art treasures. A preliminary examination of some of the most famous statues in Boston revealed to us considerable physical damage, a general lack of repair, and deterioration in their settings. The unsatisfactory condition of these works of art is evidence of lack of coordination between the Art Commission and the other City departments responsible for their continuing good repair. While all statues and other monuments are in the custody of the Art Commission, a cursory examination of that Commission's budget indicates that it does not have the financial means or the administrative staff to discharge its responsibilities

without a major reorganization or substantial assistance from the Parks and Recreation Department on whose property most of the statues are to be found. The fact that the Art Commission is part of the Administrative Services Department (a peculiar union!) suggests that its programs and recommendations may get lost in the press of other business in that busy agency. In any event, the condition of our monuments reflects badly on the City. Having in mind their historic artistic significance, their condition amounts to municipal neglect. Potential benefactors, familiar with this state of affairs, will be reluctant to make donations to the City for artistic purposes. It has been a great many years since private contributions for works of art on any scale have been forthcoming to the City of Boston. It seems reasonable to believe that a careful program of conservation and maintenance might not only enhance the appearance of the City and restore pride in its art treasures, but reassure potential benefactors that their gifts will also be properly cared for in future years. Interestingly, Messrs. Parkman and White both evidenced concern that the City maintain their gifts at City expense in their respective wills.

The improvement to the character and appearance of such important open spaces as the Commonwealth Avenue Mall, the Public Garden and the Common, which would result from an art restoration program, would be dramatic. It would surely have a favorable economic impact as well. Tourism in the City of Boston is a very substantial business and should be encouraged. It may well be one of our "growth" industries. Boston's prospects for attracting such

commerce will be greatly improved by restoring and refurbishing the City's historic statuary and other monuments.⁴ As we approach the 200th Anniversary of the American Revolution, and a unique opportunity to participate officially in its celebration, it seems particularly appropriate for the City to make a major effort to restore Boston's art treasures now. Also, if new commemorative art is to be commissioned for this occasion, the planning must start soon.

For these reasons, we recommend that the Art Commission select a qualified consultant, and in coordination with the B.R.A. Design Review Staff and the Parks and Recreation Department, undertake a comprehensive survey of the condition of the City's fine arts treasures and prepare a plan for their restoration. The survey should include all statues and other sculpture, historic monuments, plaques, gateways and ornamental fencing (particularly the cast-iron fence surrounding the Common and Public Garden) which is everywhere in a dismal condition. The Commission should then, as soon as possible, present its findings and program for the restoration, refurbishing, illuminating (where appropriate) and overall improvement of the City's works of art. Its restoration program should then be funded and executed at the earliest possible moment by

⁴ Considerable efforts must be made, which are beyond the scope of this report, to upgrade and dignify the Freedom Trail, develop historic sites now obscured or lost altogether, and properly care for such outstanding historic buildings as the Old State House, valiantly operated on an inadequate budget by the Bostonian Society.

qualified artisans under the direct supervision of the Art Commission or its consultant.

Respectfully submitted

Lawrence T. Perera, Chairman,

Joseph P. McNamara,

Russell S. Codman, Jr.,

Frederick R. H. Witherby,

THE FINANCE COMMISSION.

Thomas J. Murphy,
Executive Secretary

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